

January 2, 2004

### **TOP TEN CONSUMER COMPLAINTS IN 2003**

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem released information today, showing that in 2003 the Consumer Protection Division of his office recovered over \$2 million for North Dakota consumers. The division handled 1194 complaints in 2003, up from 1166 in 2002.

Although some of the same categories appear year after year, making the top of this year's hit list is telemarketing, with 299 complaints. Telemarketing complaints come from a variety of different categories, including magazine subscription, discount buying clubs, and violations of the state's "Do Not Call" laws. Consumers filed 81 complaints about pre-recorded messages, and 65 complaints about calls received after the "Do Not Call" list took effect. "The law is only four months old, and more than half the telephone subscribers in the state are registered on the "Do Not Call" list, said Stenehjem. "We receive complaints almost every day. Telemarketers should take note that North Dakota consumers are fed up, and won't just sit and listen any more."

The majority of pre-recorded message violations involve solicitations for questionable "credit counseling" services. The Consumer Protection division has initiated 22 investigations of telemarketing companies using prerecorded messages. To date, the division has reached a settlement and obtained payment from three companies.

Telephone and mail order complaints (#1 and #2 in 2002) round out the top three complaint categories. This year's list includes:

<b>Issue</b>	<b># of Complaints</b>
# 1    Telemarketing	299
# 2    Telecommunications	188
# 3    Mail Order	98
# 4    Motorcycles, Bikes – Recreational Vehicles	93
# 5    Credit Card    (#4 in 2002)	62
# 6    Computer	49
# 7    Magazines    (#3 in 2002)	48
# 8    Automobile    (#5 in 2002)	46
# 9    Home Improvement	44
#10   Sweepstakes	40

Billing issues were the main source of telephone complaints. These dealt with inability to cancel service from previous carrier when switching long distance carriers, general billing errors, and misrepresentation of cost per minute on long distance services. Cell phone complaints included issues regarding roaming fees, rural area service, termination penalties and general billing issues. A number of complaints dealt with web cramming (consumers being billed for Internet service they did not authorize) as well as general cramming (billing for services not authorized). Mail Order complaints related to companies failing to deliver products, refusing to issue refunds on returned products, or billing the consumer for unordered merchandise.

The Attorney General's office issues a weekly consumer advisory newsletter entitled "Too Good To Be True", and distributes informational brochures on a variety of topics. The Consumer Protection Division is available to respond to consumer concerns, at (701) 328-3404, or toll-free at 1-800-472-2600. Consumer information is also posted on the Attorney General website, [www.ag.state.nd.us](http://www.ag.state.nd.us).

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